



# NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

July 19, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that we write this letter in support of the Teach For America Native Achievement Initiative, and the inclusion of a loan forgiveness provision which gives preference to Native Hawaiian, Alaskan Native, and American Indians, facilitating their recruitment into being effective, culturally competent teachers.

This initiative has a triple benefit of impacting tens of thousands of at-risk Native students, infusing thousands of leaders into school systems that lack sufficient human capital, and creating an alumni force with the credibility and knowledge of Native issues to build long-term educational improvements.

During the 2010-11 school year, approximately 310 Teach For America corps members (CMs) in New Mexico, South Dakota, and Hawai'i collectively serve nearly 20,000 children from Native backgrounds. The Native Achievement Initiative is an exciting opportunity to grow this successful program into a national effort to work with nearly 10% of the Native student population of the nation. We believe that Native students around the nation deserve these excellent educators, who show clear results in the classroom, as demonstrated by numerous peer-reviewed external studies.

Through our Native Achievement Initiative, Teach For America hopes to more than quintuple the number of Native students we serve, finally reaching 96,000 Native children by 2015 (nearly 15 percent of the national total), while doing more to ensure that recruitment, training, and support reflects the needs, culture and values of the Native communities we serve. This will include:

- Growing to scale in our three sites that currently serve Native children
- Recruiting more American Indians and Native Hawaiians into our corps
- Identifying and selecting new regions to reach more Native students
- Building broad partnerships with Native groups to support the initiative
- Modifying the training program to accommodate the unique needs, culture and values of individual Native communities

In order to aid Teach For America and other suppliers of teachers in their efforts to recruit talented teachers into our communities, we support an ambitious proposal to incentivize teaching in Native communities through loan forgiveness provisions. A recent study has shown that at least 3 out of 4 current college students are concerned or very concerned about their ability to pay back their loans after graduating from college and rank loan forgiveness as the most important benefit they could receive from potential employers. Thus, their ability to choose national service in teaching after graduation is limited by this financial burden.

Teach For America's proposal will help curb this issue by incrementally forgive federal loans for borrowers from any teacher pathway serving as early childhood educators, elementary or secondary school teachers in Title I Native-serving schools, where at least 40 percent of students are from Native Hawaiian, Alaskan Native, or

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American Indian backgrounds. In detail, this program would provide forgiveness of 25% of a borrower's federal loans for each year of service as a full time teacher in an eligible school, such that qualifying teachers would attain total forgiveness in four years.

The opportunity for major change extends to the system level as well. Nearly 66 percent of all Teach For America's nearly 20,000 alumni remain in the field of education. Nearly half of these alumni remain in the classroom, and the other have move on to influence policy, open and run schools, work in school districts and advocate for the needs of low income students. The possibility of creating thousands of strong, dedicated advocates for Native children in this country is invaluable.

We support Teach For America's Native Achievement Initiative and the granting of loan forgiveness to teachers who dedicate their time and talent to underserved Native-serving schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jefferson Keel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jefferson Keel  
President